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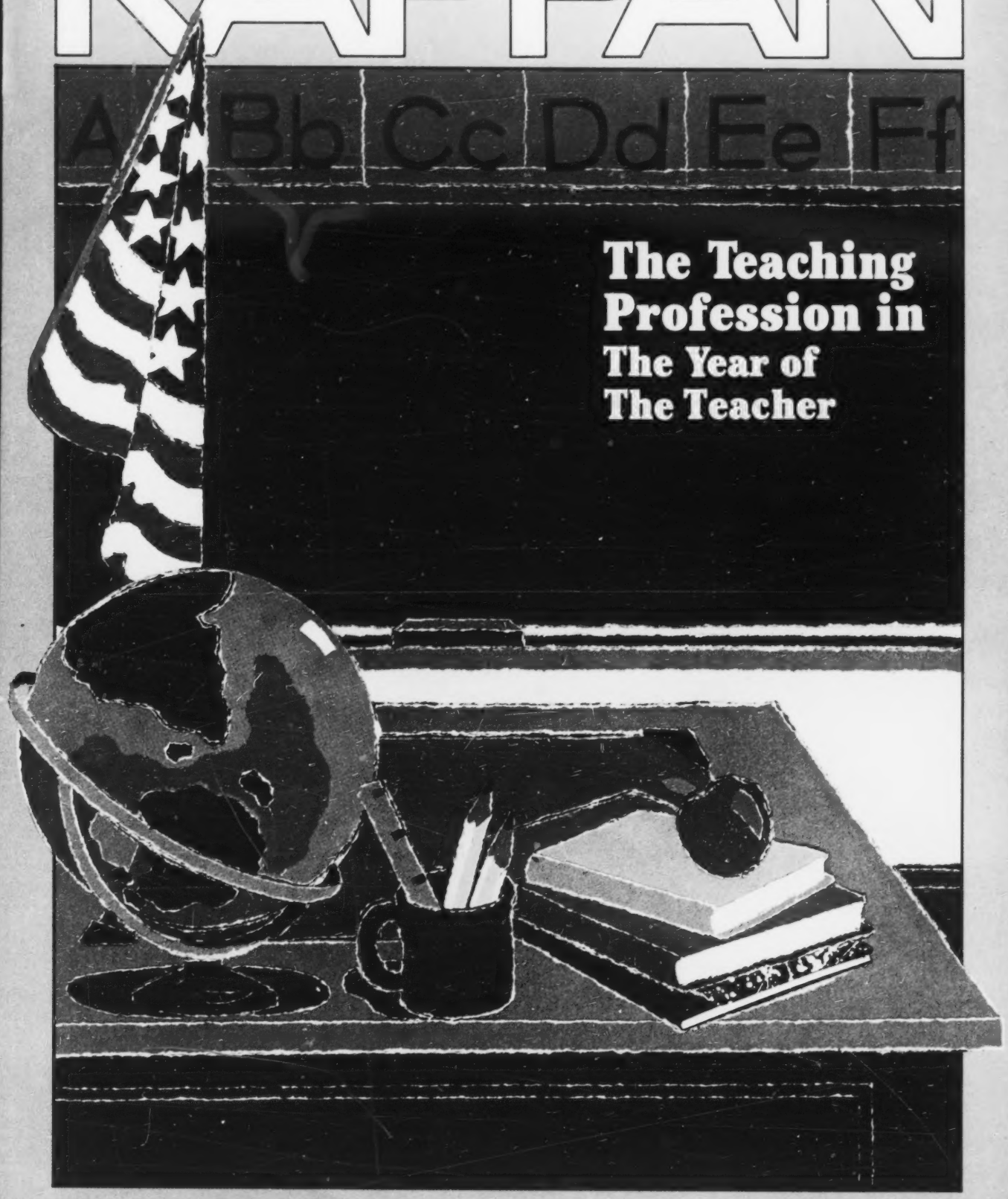
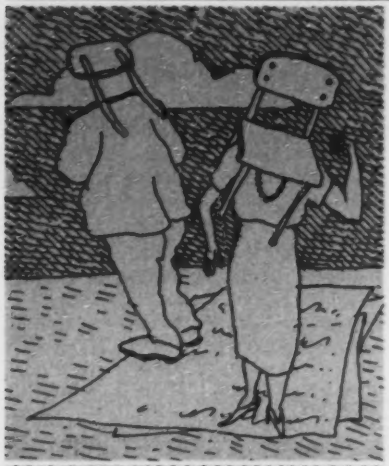
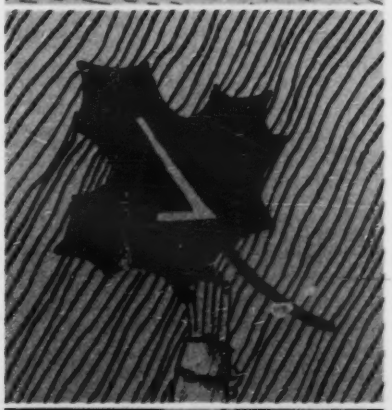


The Teaching Profession in The Year of The Teacher





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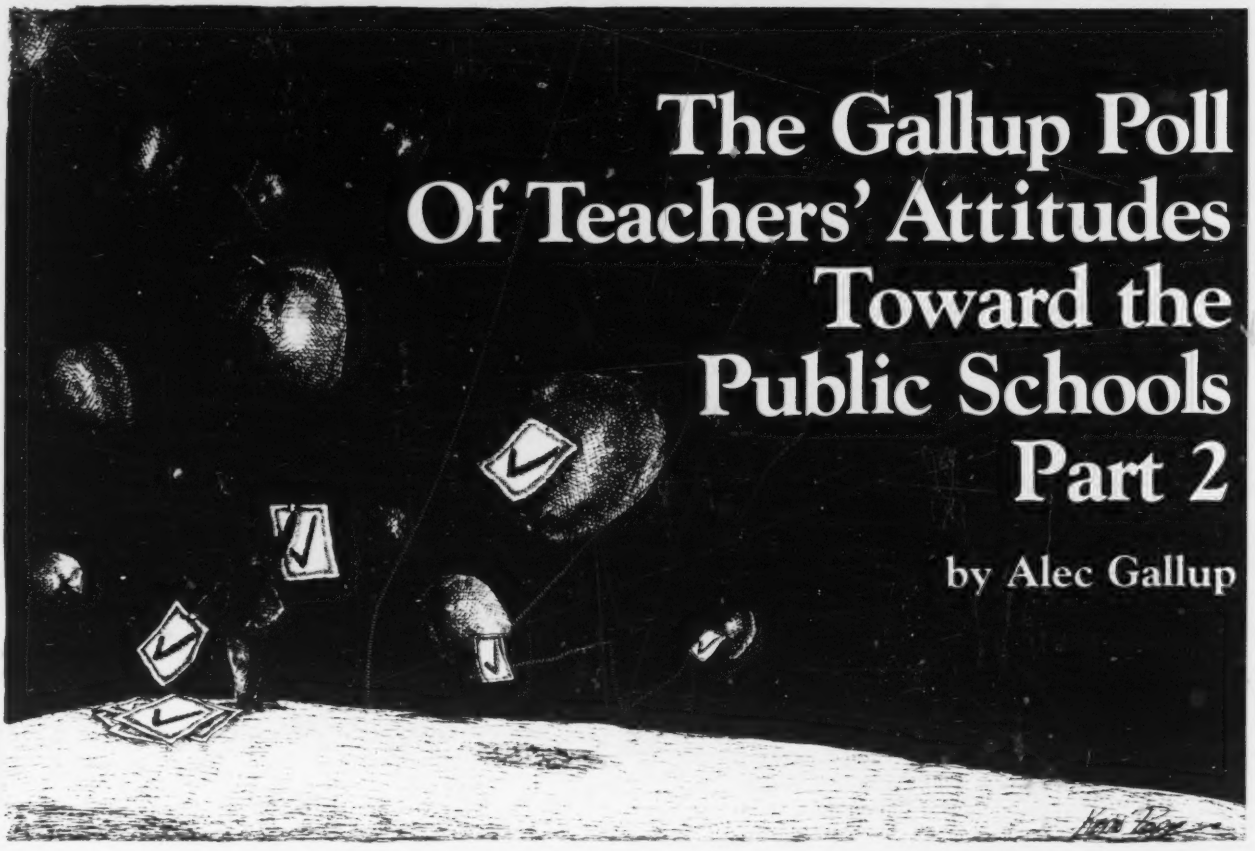


The Gallup Poll Of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools Part 2

by Alec Gallup

Research Procedure

The findings of this survey come from mail interviews with a representative sample of U.S. teachers. From a list provided by Market Data Retrieval, a sample of 2,000 teachers was selected to reflect the total national population of teachers. The sample was stratified proportionately by region and by teaching level.

Questionnaires were mailed to the 2,000 teachers between 30 April and 9 May 1984. Six questionnaires were undeliverable, producing an effective mailing of 1,994 questionnaires. Of these, 813 (41%) were completed and returned.

To insure that the attitudes of nonrespondents were not significantly different from those of respondents, a telephone survey was conducted with a sample of 100 teachers who had not answered the mail survey. The results of the telephone survey showed that the sample of nonrespondents to the mail survey closely paralleled the sample of respondents — both in terms of attitudes and in terms of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

Summary of Findings

As the first portion of this poll, published last October, revealed, attitudes of American teachers are remarkably uniform. Very few attitudinal differences are apparent among the nine subgroups in the teacher population by which the data were analyzed. Only in the case of elementary and high school teachers do differences in views emerge — and then only rarely.

At the same time, the attitudes of teachers and the public are frequently at odds. Of the approximately 30 issues in the two installments of this teacher poll on which the opinion of the public is also available, teachers and the public agree on one-third of the issues and disagree on two-thirds.

Desirability of teaching as a profession. Teachers are somewhat negative about the desirability of teaching as a profession. Teachers are about evenly divided on whether they would like a daughter to enter teaching, but they are against a son going into teaching by a ratio of 2 to 1 (59% to 31%).

By contrast, the public favors a daughter going into teaching by a ratio of about 5 to 4 (50% to 39%). The public is divided as to whether a son should enter the profession.

How teachers see themselves. Teachers rate their contribution to society the *highest* of 12 professions, including physicians, clergy, business executives, and lawyers. But they also feel that their status is the *lowest* of all of these professions.

The general public rates teachers' contribution to society somewhat lower than that of clergy or physicians. The public rates teachers' status in the community somewhat higher than the teachers themselves do.

Teacher unions/teacher strikes. U.S. teachers strongly support teacher unions and associations. By a 5 to 2 ratio, they believe that unions have contributed to public education; by a 2 to 1 ratio, they believe that teachers should have the right to strike.

By contrast, only about one person in five in the general public feels that teacher unions have improved the quality of public education. Twice as many believe that unions have hurt public education. The public also opposes, by a 2 to 1 ratio, giving teachers the right to strike.

Goals of education. A majority (56%) of teachers rate

Illustration by Kevin Pope

developing good work habits, the ability to organize one's thoughts, and the ability to concentrate as a most important goal of education. The same percentage of teachers also rate the ability to think — creatively, objectively, and analytically — as a goal of the highest importance. A majority of teachers also cite developing the ability to speak and write, developing the ability to use mathematics for everyday problems, and encouraging the desire for lifelong learning as among the highest priorities of education.

Attitudes concerning some recommendations of the national commissions and task forces on education. The attitudes of U.S. teachers are mixed regarding the recommendations for improving the public schools that have been made by the recent wave of national commissions and task forces on education. By wide margins, teachers favor higher salaries for teachers and state board examinations to prove teachers' knowledge of subject matter (October *Kappan*).

The reform reports also made a number of recommendations for changing subject requirements. Virtually all teachers (95%) agree with the reports that English and math should be required of all students, not just the college-bound. Specifically, teachers recommend an average of 3.8 years of English for the college-bound and 3.6 years of English for the non-college-bound; 3.2 years of math for the college-bound and 2.7 years of math for the non-college-bound; 3.0 years of science for the college-bound and 2.7 years of science for the non-college-bound.

Fifty-nine percent of teachers would require all students to take computer science; 78% would require vocational training for the non-college-bound, and 48% would require some vocational education even for the college-bound. Seventy-seven percent of teachers would require about two years (2.1) of a foreign language for college-bound students.

The public's attitudes toward subject requirements are basically the same as those of teachers, with the exception that a smaller percentage of the public would require science of high school students and a slightly larger percentage would require computer science.

Another of the major recommendations of the national commissions and task forces was that either the school day or school year be lengthened to provide more time for instruction. U.S. teachers oppose both of these recommendations by roughly the same margins: 66% oppose lengthening the school year; 72% oppose lengthening the school day. Virtually every major subgroup in the teacher population opposes both of these recommendations.

Sex education. U.S. teachers overwhelmingly support sex education in both the secondary schools and the elementary schools. Almost nine out of 10 teachers (86%) support sex education in high school, and three out of four (75%) support sex education in elementary school.

More specifically, for high school students, large majorities of teachers approve the discussion of such topics as the biology of reproduction, venereal disease, and birth control. Smaller majorities approve of including in high school sex education classes such topics as premarital sex, the nature of sexual intercourse, abortion, and homosexuality. For elementary school students, the only topic that a majority of teachers (70%) feel would be appropriate is the biology of reproduction.

The public supports sex education in the high schools by a smaller margin than teachers do (70% as opposed to 86%). But the public is about evenly divided — 45% for and 48% against — on the question of sex education in the elementary schools.

Control of instruction. Teachers feel that they should have the most influence on what is taught in the public schools. They feel even more strongly that they should have the most influence in the selection of schoolbooks.

By contrast, the public feels that parents and school boards should have the most say about what is taught in the public schools. But the public agrees with teachers that teachers should have the most say about the selection of books and other instructional materials.

Desirability of Teaching as a Profession

As a way of measuring their attitudes about the desirability of teaching as a profession, teachers were first asked whether they would like to have a daughter or a son enter the teaching profession. Teachers are about evenly divided in the case of a daughter's becoming a teacher (43% in favor, 46% opposed) and about 2 to 1 against a son's doing so (31% in favor, 59% opposed).

The question:

Would you like to have a *daughter* of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?
Would you like to have a *son* of yours take up teaching in the public schools as a career?

	Daughter %	Son %
Yes	43	31
No	46	59
No opinion	11	10

Teacher Opinion vs. Public Opinion

Teachers' views on the desirability of teaching as a profession differ somewhat from the attitudes of the public. For example, the public favors a daughter's entering teaching by a ratio of roughly 5 to 4 (50% to 39%). For a son, the public is about evenly divided: 46% say that this would be a good idea, and 42% say that it would be a bad idea.

	All Teachers		U.S. Public	
	Daughter	Son	Daughter (1984)	Son (1984)
	%	%	%	%
Yes	43	31	50	46
No	46	59	39	42
No opinion	11	10	11	12

How Teachers See Themselves

Teachers were asked to rate each of 12 professions on a scale of zero to 10 to indicate their perceptions regarding two factors: 1) the profession's contribution to society and 2) the amount of prestige people in that profession have in their communities.

Not surprisingly, teaching heads the list for contribution to society, with about six teachers in 10 giving their peers a top rating. Next in order are physicians, who receive a 10 from 46% of teachers, and clergy, who receive a 10 from 43% of teachers.

Public school principals are far down the list. Only 19% of teachers give school principals a 10 for their contribution to society. At the bottom of the list are lawyers (6%), funeral directors (5%), business executives (4%), local political officeholders (4%), bankers (3%), realtors (2%), and advertising practitioners (2%).

The prestige that teachers feel they have in their own communities appears to be a sensitive subject. Only 1% of teachers give their profession the highest rating for its status in the community.

When ratings of societal contribution are compared with ratings of community status, we find that teachers rate three professions — teaching, the clergy, and public school principals — as lower in status than in their contribution to society. The gap for teachers is by far the largest — 59% to 1%.

The question:

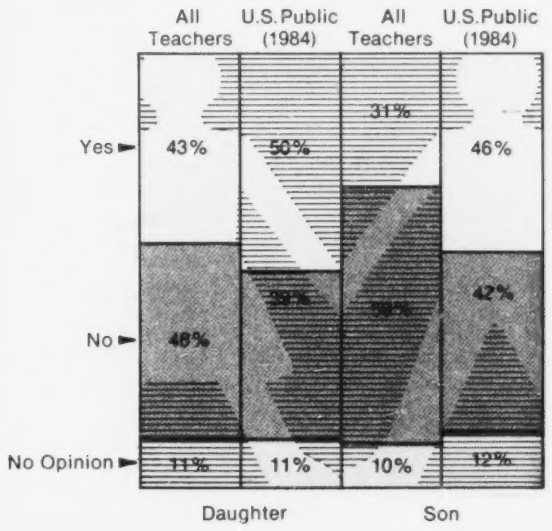
Now we would like your impressions about different professions and occupations — based on your personal experience or on what you've heard or read. To indicate your impression, please use this scale that goes from the lowest rating of zero to the highest rating of 10.

First rate the professions listed below for the amount each contributes to the general good of society. The more you feel it contributes to the good of society, the higher the number you would pick; the less you feel it contributes, the lower the number you would pick.

Now rate these professions for the amount of prestige or status you feel people in each profession have in your community.

	Highest Rating	
	General Good Of Society %	Prestige Or Status %
Public school teachers	59	1
Physicians	46	68
Clergy	43	20

Is Teaching a Desirable Profession?



	Highest Rating	
	General Good Of Society %	Prestige Or Status %
Public school principals	19	3
Judges	13	45
Lawyers	6	32
Funeral directors	5	4
Business executives	4	26
Local political officeholders	4	15
Bankers	3	22
Realtors	2	3
Advertising practitioners	2	4

Teacher Opinion vs. Public Opinion

The public's feelings about the contribution teachers make to society and about the status of teachers differ somewhat from the views held by teachers. The public feels that teachers contribute substantially less to society than teachers feel they do. Twenty-nine percent of the public would give teachers the highest rating for their contribution to society, compared with 59% of teachers who would give themselves a 10.

On the other hand, the public feels that teachers have *more* status in the community than teachers feel that they do. Nineteen percent of the public would give teachers the highest rating for status. This figure is far higher than the 1% of teachers who rate their status a 10, but it is still one of the lower ratings that the public gives to any profession. Indeed, teaching is the profession that the public perceives as having the largest disparity between its status in the community and its contribution to society.

	Highest Rating			
	General Good of Society		Prestige or Status	
	All Teachers %	U.S. Public %	All Teachers %	U.S. Public %
Public school teachers	59	29	1	19
Physicians	46	41	68	59
Clergy	43	46	20	42
Public school principals	19	28	3	25
Judges	13	12	45	31
Lawyers	6	12	32	31
Funeral directors	5	20	4	17
Business executives	4	-	26	-
Local political officeholders	4	8	15	16
Bankers	3	14	22	35
Realtors	2	7	3	6
Advertising practitioners	2	4	4	8

Unions, Strikes, and Arbitration

American teachers strongly support teacher unionism, as well as teachers' right to strike over salaries and working conditions. Asked whether they feel that unionization has helped or hurt the quality of public education in the U.S., half of the teacher respondents (49%) say that it has helped; only 18% say that unionization has hurt public education; 26% say that it has made no difference.

Teachers also support their right to strike. Asked whether public school teachers should be permitted to

Chart by Mary Miller

strike, almost two-thirds (63%) feel that they should be permitted to strike; only 26% say that teacher strikes should not be allowed.

Interestingly, teachers favor compulsory arbitration in disputes. Asked if they would favor arbitration if an agreement cannot be reached between a union and a school board, nine out of 10 favor such a plan, and only 3% are opposed.

The question:

Most teachers in the nation now belong to unions or associations that bargain over salaries, working conditions, and the like. Has unionization, in your opinion, helped, hurt, or made no difference in the quality of public education in the U.S.?

	All Teachers %	Elementary Teachers %	High School Teachers %
Helped	49	48	50
Hurt	18	20	15
No difference	26	25	28
No opinion	7	7	7

The question:

Should public school teachers be permitted to strike or not?

	All Teachers %	Elementary Teachers %	High School Teachers %
Yes	63	58	70
No	26	30	20
No opinion	11	12	10

The question:

In case an agreement cannot be reached between a teacher union (or association) and the school board, would you favor or oppose a plan that would require the dispute to be settled by the decision of an arbitrator or panel acceptable to both the union and school board?

	All Teachers %	Elementary Teachers %	High School Teachers %
Favor	90	88	92
Oppose	3	4	2
No opinion	7	8	6

Teacher Opinion vs. Public Opinion

Teacher attitudes regarding the effects of unionization are in almost direct contrast to the attitudes of the general public. Whereas teachers — by a margin of almost 3 to 1 (49% to 18%) — feel that unions have helped the quality of American education, the public — by a margin of 2 to 1 — believes that unionization has hurt education.

Moreover, while teachers feel that they should have the right to strike (63% favor this right), 56% of the public *oppose* teacher strikes. The public agrees with the views of teachers concerning compulsory arbitration in settling disputes. Large majorities of teachers (90%) and of the public (79%) favor compulsory arbitration.

Effects of Unionization	All Teachers %	U.S. Public (1981) %
Helped education	49	18
Hurt education	18	37
Made no difference	26	33
No opinion	7	12

Teacher Strikes	All Teachers %	U.S. Public (1981) %
Yes, teachers should have the right	63	37
No, they should not	26	56
No opinion	11	7

How Much Do Teachers Contribute to Society?

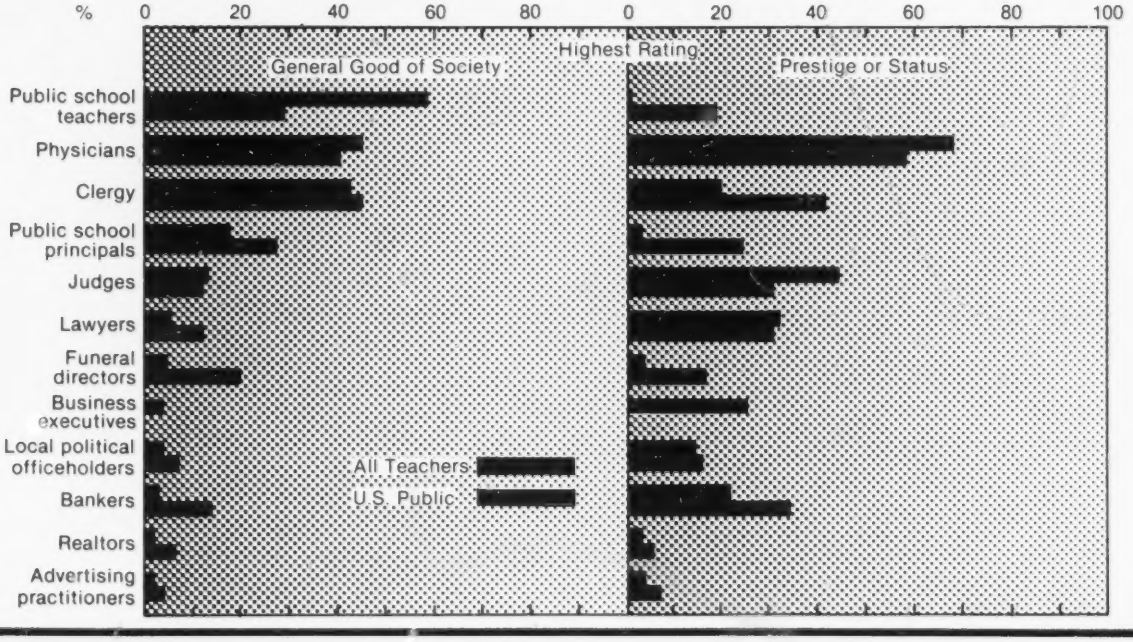


Chart by Mary Miller

Require Compulsory Arbitration	All Teachers	U.S. Public (1982)
	%	%
Favor	90	79
Oppose	3	7
No opinion	7	14

The Goals of Education

U.S. teachers were asked to rate the importance of certain goals of education on a scale of zero to 10. Fifty-six percent of teachers gave the highest rating (10) to two goals: developing good work habits, the ability to organize one's thoughts, and the ability to concentrate; and developing the ability to think — creatively, objectively, and analytically. Fifty-five percent of teachers gave a top rating to developing the ability to speak and write correctly; 53%, to developing the ability to use mathematics for everyday problems; and 51%, to encouraging the desire to continue learning as a lifelong process.

The highest percentage of the U.S. public (68%) gives a 10 to developing the ability to speak and write correctly. The second-highest percentage of the public (64%) gives the highest rating to developing standards of what is right and wrong.

The question:

Please rate the importance of each of the following possible goals of education on a scale of zero to 10. A zero means a goal is not at all important and should not be part of the public school program. A 10 means a goal is the most important goal — before all others. A rating between zero and 10 means you consider the goal to be somewhere in between in importance.

	Highest Rating	
	All Teachers	U.S. Public (1984)
	%	%
To help develop good work habits, the ability to organize one's thoughts, the ability to concentrate	56	48
To develop the ability to think — creatively, objectively, analytically	56	51
To develop the ability to speak and write correctly	55	68
To develop the ability to use mathematics for everyday problems	53	54
To encourage the desire to continue learning throughout one's life	51	41
To encourage respect for law and order, for obeying the rules of society	46	52
To develop the ability to live in a complex and changing world	41	51
To prepare those who plan to attend college for college	36	46
To develop skills needed to get jobs for those not planning to attend college	34	54
To develop standards of what is "right and wrong"	33	64
To develop the desire to excel	32	51
To develop an understanding of democracy and to promote participation in the political process	31	33
To develop the ability to get along with different kinds of people	31	42
To develop respect for and understanding of other races, religions, nations, and cultures	30	39
To develop the ability to deal with adult responsibilities and problems, i.e., sex, marriage, parenting, personal finances, alcohol and drug abuse	28	46
To help students make realistic plans for what they will do after high school graduation	27	52
To develop an understanding about different kinds of jobs and careers, including their requirements and rewards	20	56
To gain knowledge and understanding of science and scientific facts	17	45
To gain knowledge of the important facts of history, geography, etc.	15	42
To develop an appreciation for and participation in the arts, music, literature, theater, etc.	14	35
To help students overcome personal problems	13	45
To develop the ability to understand and use computers	12	43
To promote physical development through sports programs	8	20
To help students get good/high-paying jobs	6	46
To develop an appreciation of the "good" things in life	6	32

Subject Requirements

One of the major recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education was that significantly more time in high school be devoted to the traditional basics, English and mathematics, as well as to certain "new" basics, including science, computer science, foreign languages for the college-bound, and vocational training. Virtually all teachers feel that English, math, and science should be required for all students, both those who intend to go to college and those who do not.

However, teachers would distinguish between the college-bound and the non-college-bound in the number of years they would require of a given subject. For example, the average number of years of English that teachers would require for college-bound students is 3.8; the figure for non-college-bound students is 3.6. The figures for math are 3.4 years for the college-bound and 2.7 for the non-college-bound. For science, teachers would require 3.0 years for the college-bound and 2.2 years for the non-college-bound.

The question:

If you were the one to decide, which of the following subjects would you require every public high school student who *plans to go on to college* to take?

What about those public high school students who *do not plan to go on to college* when they graduate? Which courses would you require them to take?

	Should Be Required			
	For Those Planning to Go to College	Average Years Required	For Those Not Planning To Go to College	Average Years Required
	%	%	%	%
Mathematics	96	3.4	94	2.7
English	95	3.8	93	3.6
History/U.S. government	95	2.9	91	2.2

	Should Be Required			
	For Those Planning to Go to College %	Average Years Required %	For Those Not Planning To Go to College %	Average Years Required %
Science	95	2.8	90	2.4
Foreign language	77	2.1	28	1.4
Physical education	74	2.6	73	2.6
Health education	73	1.5	75	1.6
Business	63	1.5	80	2.1
Art	54	1.3	45	1.3
Music	49	1.3	42	1.3
Industrial arts/ homemaking	46	1.4	78	2.4

Teacher Opinion vs. Public Opinion

The public agrees with teachers about the importance of requiring high school students to take English and mathematics. More than 90% of teachers and of the public would require all students to take these subjects. Similar percentages of the public and of teachers would require high school students to take business, and a somewhat smaller percentage of the public than of teachers would require high school students to take history and science.

For all other subjects, however, a much smaller percentage of the public than of teachers endorses course requirements for either college-bound or non-college-bound students.

	Should Be Required			
	For Those Planning to Go to College		For Those Not Planning to Go to College	
	All Teachers %	U.S. Public %	All Teachers %	U.S. Public %
Mathematics	96	96	94	92
English	95	94	93	90
History/U.S. government	95	84	91	71
Science	95	84	90	61
Foreign language	77	57	28	19
Physical education	74	43	73	44
Health education	73	52	75	50
Business	63	68	80	76
Art	54	24	45	18
Music	49	22	42	18
Industrial arts/homemaking	46	37*	78	83*

*The U.S. public was asked about "vocational training."

Extending the School Day or Year

Some of the education reform reports have recommended extending the length of the school day, the length of the school year, or both, in order to provide more time for instruction. U.S. teachers oppose both of these recommendations by roughly the same margins — 72% to 24% in the case of lengthening the school day and 66% to 28% in the case of lengthening the school year.

By contrast, the U.S. public is only marginally opposed to lengthening the school day or school year. The public opposes extending the school day by a margin of 42% to 52%, and the public opposes extending the school year by a margin of 44% to 50%.

The question:

How do you feel about extending the school day by one hour in the school in which you teach? Aside from the question of teacher/staff compensation, do you favor or oppose this idea?

	All Teachers %	U.S. Public (1984) %
Favor	24	42
Oppose	72	52
No opinion	4	6

The question:

In some nations, students attend school as many as 240 days a year, as compared to about 180 days in the U.S. Aside from the question of teacher/staff compensation, how do you feel about extending the public school year in this community by 30 days, making the school year about 210 days or 10 months long? Do you favor or oppose this idea?

	All Teachers %	U.S. Public (1984) %
Favor	28	44
Oppose	66	50
No opinion	6	6

Sex Education

U.S. teachers overwhelmingly support sex education in both public high schools and public elementary schools. Almost nine out of 10 teachers (86%) feel that sex education should be part of the instructional program in the high schools; only 8% oppose the idea. Seventy-five percent of teachers favor including sex education in the elementary schools; only 18% oppose the idea.

However, teachers believe that different sexual topics are appropriate for different levels of schooling. For example, eight out of 10 teachers feel that the following topics should be covered in high school sex education classes: the biology of reproduction, venereal disease, and birth control. Smaller majorities feel that premarital sex, abortion, homosexuality, and the nature of sexual intercourse should be covered in high school classes. Other than the biology of reproduction, much smaller percentages of teachers feel that specific sexual topics should be covered in the elementary schools.

The question:

Do you feel the public high schools should or should not include sex education in their instructional program?

Do you feel the public *elementary* schools should or should not include sex education in grades 4 through 8?

	In High School %	In Elementary School %
Should	86	75
Should not	8	18
No opinion	6	7

The question:

Which of the following topics, if any, should be included for high school students?

Which of the following topics, if any, should be included for elementary school students?

	In High School			In Elementary School		
	Should %	Should Not %	No Opinion %	Should %	Should Not %	No Opinion %
The biology of reproduction	83	15	2	70	28	2
Venereal disease	83	15	2	40	50	10
Birth control	80	18	2	29	58	13
Premarital sex	68	24	8	21	65	14
The nature of sexual intercourse	62	28	10	24	63	13
Abortion	64	27	9	18	65	17
Homosexuality	55	31	14	15	68	17

Teacher Opinion vs. Public Opinion

Almost as large a percentage of the U.S. public (70%) as of U.S. teachers (86%) supports sex education as part of the high school instructional program. For elementary schools, the public is about evenly divided; 45% favor and 48% oppose sex education in the elementary schools. However, with regard to the specific topics to be included in sex education at both levels, the public is substantially less in favor of instruction in each of these areas.

	In High School		In Elementary School	
Include Sex Education	**All Teachers %**	**U.S. Public %**	**All Teachers %**	**U.S. Public %**
Should	86	70	75	45
Should not	8	22	18	48
No opinion	6	8	7	7

	Should Be Included in High School		Should Be Included in Elementary School	
	All Teachers %	U.S. Public %	All Teachers %	U.S. Public %
Sex education (in general)	86	70	75	45
The biology of reproduction	83	54	70	37
Venereal disease	83	59	40	23
Birth control	80	55	29	20
Premarital sex	68	42	21	18
The nature of sexual intercourse	62	37	24	16
Abortion	64	38	18	12
Homosexuality	55	32	15	10

Control of Instruction

U.S. teachers feel that they should have the most influence in deciding what is taught in the public schools in their communities. They feel even more strongly that they should have the most influence in the selection of books for classroom use and for school libraries.

For example, 33% of teachers feel that teachers should have the most influence in deciding what is taught; 19% say the school board, 17% say the state government, and 3% say the federal government. Only 2% say that parents should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught.

Almost eight in 10 teachers (79%) feel that they should have the most influence in the selection of books for classrooms and school libraries. Only 4% say principals or school administrators, 3% say the school board, and 2% say the parents.

The question:

In your opinion, who should have the greatest

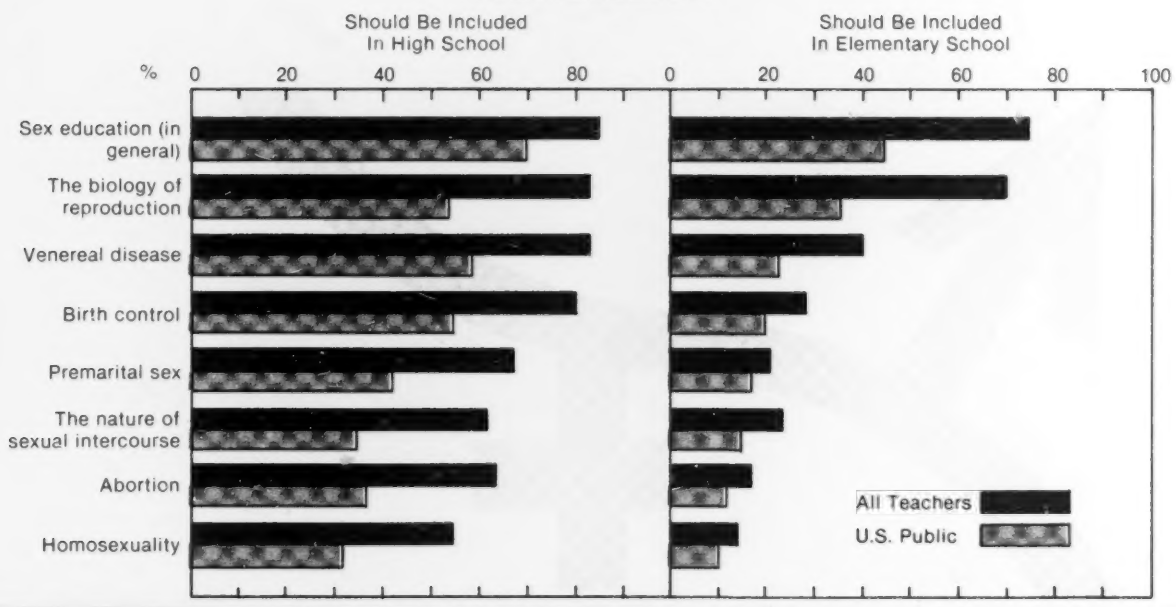


Chart by Mary Miller

influence in deciding what is taught in the public schools of your community?

	All Teachers %	Elementary Teachers %	High School Teachers %
Teachers	33	31	35
Local school board	19	17	20
State government	17	19	16
Federal government	3	2	3
Parents	2	2	2
No opinion	26	29	24

The question:

Who do you feel should have the most influence in the selection of books for use in public school classrooms and school libraries?

	All Teachers %	Elementary Teachers %	High School Teachers %
Teachers	79	76	82
Principals and school administrators	4	5	2
School board	3	2	3
Parents	*	*	1
No opinion	14	17	12

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Teacher Opinion vs. Public Opinion

Whereas teachers feel strongly that they should have the most say in determining what is taught in the public schools, the public feels that parents and local school boards should have the most influence in this area. Only 11% of the public agree that teachers should have the most influence; 27% say the school board, and 24% say parents.

In the selection of books for classrooms and school libraries, only 42% of the public feel that teachers should have the most influence. About one in five members of the public (18%) feel that parents should have the most influence in book selection.

	Who Should Decide What Is Taught? All Teachers %	Who Should Decide What Is Taught? U.S. Public (1984) %
Teachers	33	11
Local school board	19	27
State government	17	17
Federal government	3	9
Parents	2	24
No opinion	26	12

	Who Should Select Books for Classrooms And Libraries? All Teachers %	Who Should Select Books for Classrooms And Libraries? U.S. Public (1984) %
Teachers	79	42
Principals and school administrators	4	15
School board	3	13
Parents	*	18
No opinion	14	12

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Ordering This Poll

The *Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward The Public Schools* that appeared in the October 1984 issue and in this issue will be available as a separate publication in February. The price is $2 (PDK members $1.50). To order, write: Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Indiana residents add 5% sales tax.

Who Should Decide What Is Taught?

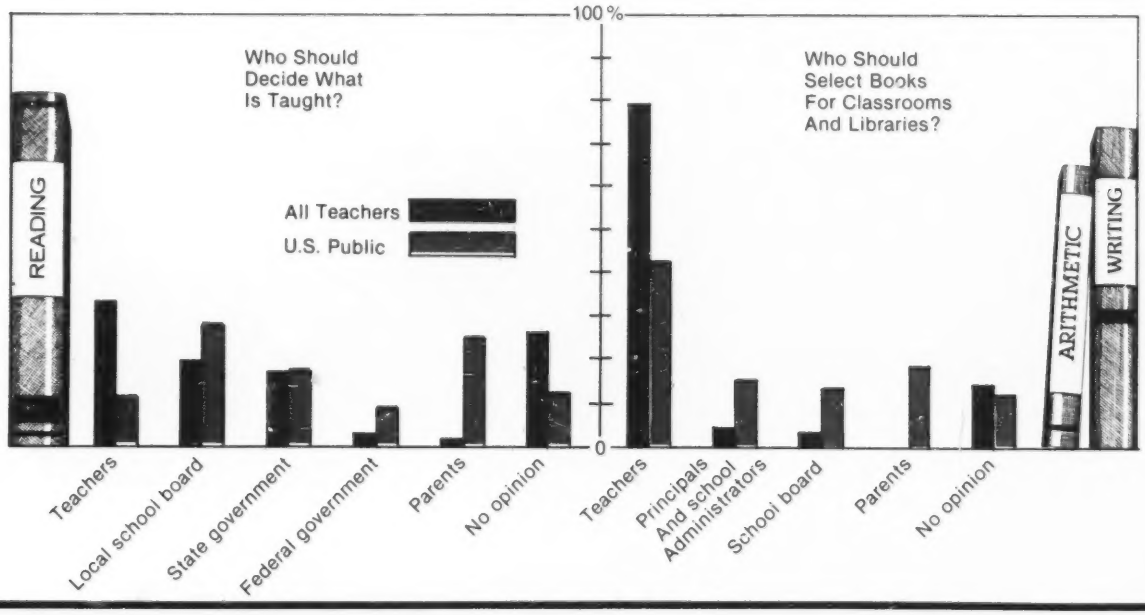


Chart by Mary Miller

Voices from the Attic: Canadian Public Opinion on Education

The first-ever poll of Canadians' attitudes toward their public schools shows some remarkable similarities to Gallup polls conducted in the U.S. — and some surprising differences. Perhaps the most important finding is that schools must begin to communicate more effectively with their communities.

by G. E. Malcolm MacLeod

EDUCATORS IN CANADA look forward with great interest to the results of the annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. The September issue of the *Kappan*, which carries this poll, is well-thumbed by Canadian readers. The poll, with its trend questions and its items on current issues in education, is just one of the many ways in which education in Canada is influenced by research conducted in the U.S.

But to what extent are the findings of studies done in the U.S. valid and applicable in Canada? Clearly, Canada

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Illustration by Kevin Pope

is similar to the U.S. in many ways. Though the Canadian population is only about one-tenth as large as that of the U.S., Canadians read many of the same publications and watch many of the same television programs as their neighbors to the south. The continental area of Canada is slightly larger than that of the U.S., but the two countries have shared many of the same geographical realities in the course of their development. Ninety percent of the population of Canada is located within 100 miles of the border we share with the U.S.; in fact, parts of Canada actually lie south of parts of California, and, to cross the river from Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit, Michigan, the traveler must go north, not south. In many ways, the organization and operation of Canadian and U.S. school systems are similar. Yet differences also exist between the two countries — differences in history, in tradition, in specific current problems.

It was against that background that the Canadian Education Association (CEA) decided to undertake a poll of Canadian public opinion on education. The CEA serves as a central source of information on educational matters throughout Canada. Since its establishment in 1892, the CEA has, of course, conducted a wide variety of research. And opinion polling in Canada, as in the States, has become a major enterprise over the years. But Canada never had a national poll of public opinion on the entire field of education until the 1984 CEA poll, which was conducted last March and April with the help of Canadian Gallup Poll Limited.[1] The report was released in September 1984 in the two official languages of Canada, English and French.[2]

The 1984 CEA survey drew on two sources: 1) a 1979 poll by the CEA that focused on the involvement of the Canadian public in educational decision making and 2) the more recent of the annual Gallup polls of attitudes in the U.S. toward public education. Although more general in scope than the 1979 CEA poll, the 1984 CEA survey included several items from that earlier study, in order to assess changes in Canadian public opinion over the intervening five years. For purposes of comparison, it also included several questions that parallel items in recent Gallup surveys on education in the U.S.

The 1984 CEA poll was designed to measure public opinion across Canada on a number of issues related to education. The data have been analyzed both to provide a "general reading" of the views of the national sample of 2,109 respondents and to focus on such specific variables as region, community size, age, gender, level of education, occupation, income, mother tongue, and number of children in school. We hope that the findings will enable us to deal better with current problems and to shape Canadian education more effectively for the future.

Some of the findings of the 1984 CEA poll will not surprise *Kappan* readers, but others will. The most irritating characteristic of such a survey — and its greatest strength — is the fact that it raises more questions than it answers. This is an inevitable outcome, particularly when pollsters attempt to cover a wide range of topics in relatively brief interviews.

Among the findings of the Canadian survey, these points stand out:

- Canadians clearly believe that schools are important.
- Canadians have a high degree of confidence in the schools' ability to serve the public's needs.
- When asked to grade their local schools, 48% of the respondents gave them a grade of A or B and only 3% gave them a grade of FAIL. The highest grades were awarded for buildings and equipment, curriculum, and books and instructional materials. The lowest grades were awarded for preparing students for jobs.
- Canadians were divided over whether the schools have improved since their own schooldays — 44% said that schools have improved, but 36% said that they have worsened. The curriculum and parental involvement in school activities were the two factors most frequently mentioned as improved; standards and teachers' interest in students were most frequently mentioned as having worsened.
- Most frequently mentioned as major problems confronting the schools were drugs, smoking, and alcohol (mentioned by 17.2% of all respondents) and lack of discipline (mentioned by 16.5%).
- Those respondents who had a child enrolled in school at some point during the three years preceding the poll were more likely than other respondents to express positive opinions about the schools.
- Nearly half of the respondents felt that the public has too little say in how the schools are run (a finding that remains relatively unchanged from the CEA poll of five years ago).
- Approximately two-thirds of the respondents (66%) said that they have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the ability of their local school boards to handle issues related to the schools (a finding that also remains relatively unchanged from the 1979 CEA poll, when 64.2% of the respondents expressed some degree of confidence in their school boards).
- Finally, the 1984 CEA poll indicated that Canadians are evenly divided on the question of whether they would or would not be willing to pay higher taxes to finance education. Forty-six percent said that they would be willing to pay higher taxes; 45% said that they would not.

WHAT SIGNIFICANCE will the findings of the 1984 CEA poll have for Canadian educators at all levels and for their professional organizations? What lessons can we learn? What facets of Canadian education should we be trying to change? What policies ought we to be developing for the future? In an effort to answer such questions, let us look more closely at the major findings of the survey.

Importance of Schooling to Future Success

A remarkable 79% of the respondents said that schools are extremely important to one's future success, and another 18% deemed schools fairly important. Only 3% said that schools are not too important, that schools are not important at all, or that they had no opinion. No other item in the CEA poll elicited such a strongly one-sided response. Moreover, respondents differed very little on this item by region, age, or any of the several other variables by which the data were analyzed.

Degree of Confidence in the Schools

Asked how much confidence they have in each of eight institutions, Canadian respondents put the schools at the head of the list. Seventy-five percent of

all respondents said that they have a great deal of confidence or a fair amount of confidence in the schools. Local government and the church followed closely behind the schools — a finding similar to that of the 1980 Gallup survey of attitudes in the U.S. toward public education.

	Canada		U.S.	
	Rank (1984)	%* (1984)	Rank (1980)	%* (1980)
The schools	1	75.5	2	74
Local government	2	70.8	3	70
The church	3	70.7	1	82
Federal government	4	67.6	6	61
The courts	5	66.9	5	64
Provincial government	6	63.1	4	69
Big business	7	59.4	7	55
Labor unions	8	46.0	7	55

*Respondents who said they have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence.

1984 Rating of the Public Schools

Asked to give the schools in Canada a grade of A, B, C, D, or FAIL, 48% of all respondents awarded the schools a grade of A or B, and only 3% gave the schools a FAIL. In the 1979 CEA survey, by contrast, 58% of all respondents gave the schools in Canada a grade of A or B, and 3% gave the schools a FAIL. The 10% decline since 1979 in the proportion of respondents awarding top grades to the schools does not mean that the schools received more low grades in the 1984 poll, however. Rather, the shift was to the "don't know" response category, which jumped from 6% in 1979 to 17% in 1984.

	National Totals %	Children In School %	No Children In School %
A rating	10	16	7
B rating	38	45	34
C rating	27	28	26
D rating	5	5	5
FAIL	3	3	4
Don't know	17	3	24

The CEA poll also asked respondents to grade several specific aspects of the schools. Canadians gave their schools the highest grades (68%, A or B) for buildings and equipment, followed by curriculum (55%, A or B) and books and instructional materials (51%, A or B). The lowest grades went to the schools' performance in preparing students for jobs (23%, A or B; 12%, FAIL).

Tax Increases to Support the Public Schools

Canadians were evenly divided on the question of whether they would (46%) or would not (45%) be willing to pay higher taxes in support of education. However, Canadians seem to be slightly more favorably disposed than U.S. citizens to the idea of paying higher taxes for education. The 1984 Gallup survey showed that 41% of U.S. respondents would be willing to pay higher taxes to finance education, while 47% of U.S. respondents would not. However, Canadians are less inclined than U.S. citizens to see lack of adequate financial support as a serious problem for the schools. One in seven U.S. respondents in 1984 mentioned lack of financial support

Canadians Express Level of Confidence in The Institutions That Serve the Public's Needs

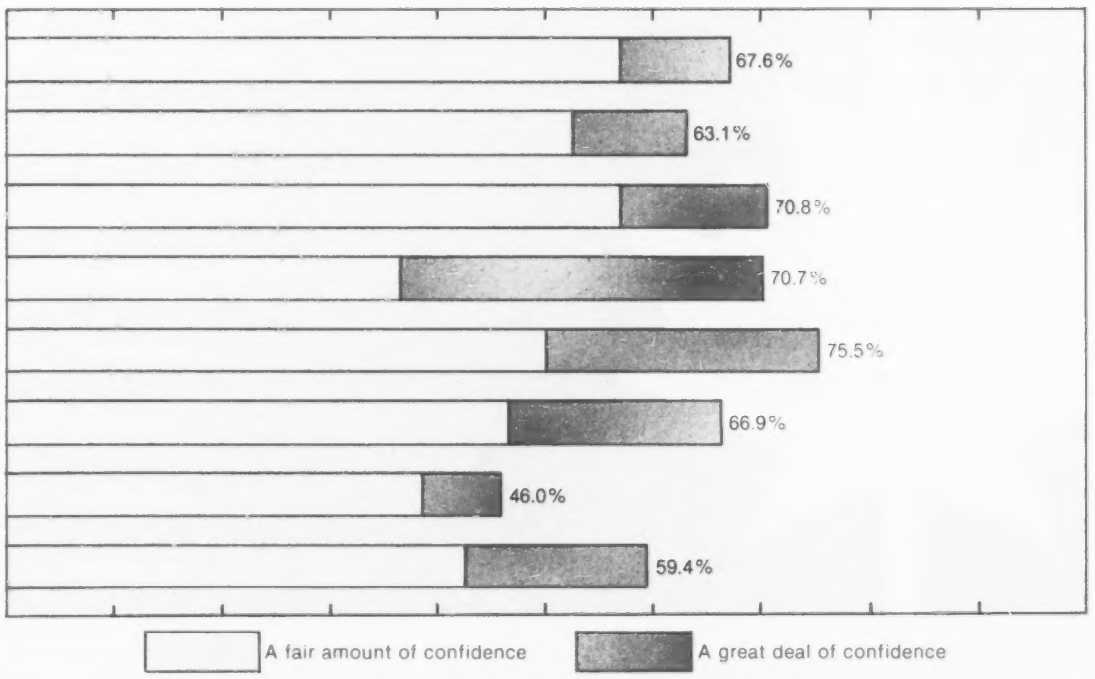

Chart by Mary Miller

as a serious problem, whereas only one in 14 Canadian respondents did so.

Major Problems Confronting the Public Schools in 1984

The CEA poll of public attitudes toward Canadian education included, verbatim, one question that has appeared annually in the Gallup survey of public attitudes toward education in the U.S.: What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal? Privately, many Canadians expected lack of discipline — the most frequently mentioned problem in U.S. polls for every year but one since 1969 — to be mentioned less frequently by Canadians as a major school problem.

This expectation proved correct. In each Gallup survey conducted during the past 10 years, approximately one-quarter of the U.S. respondents mentioned lack of discipline as a major school problem. By contrast, only 16.5% of the Canadians surveyed by the CEA in 1984 cited lack of discipline as a major problem for their schools.

The problem mentioned most frequently in Canada was drugs, smoking, and alcohol (cited by 17.2% of the respondents). In U.S. polls, the use of drugs was the second most frequently mentioned problem facing the schools in both 1983 and 1984 — mentioned by 18% of the respondents in each of those years.

Canadians in 1984 named pupils' lack of interest/truancy/bad attitudes as the third most serious problem (cited by 13.4%). By contrast, poor curriculum/poor standards ranked third in the U.S., mentioned by 14% of all respondents in 1983 and by 15% in 1984.

Curriculum concerns ranked fourth as a school problem in the 1984 CEA poll, cited by 10.6% of the Canadian respondents. In both 1983 and 1984 lack of proper financial support ranked fourth as a school problem in the U.S., mentioned by 13% of 1983 respondents and by 14% of 1984 respondents.

These findings suggest that a larger proportion of the U.S. population than of the Canadian population feels able to specify the problems confronting its schools and regards these problems as serious. More important, the problems that rank in first and second places in both the U.S. and Canada — lack of discipline and use of drugs — are not exclusively problems of education; rather, they reflect a general malaise that currently afflicts both the family and the larger society. Clearly, both Canadians and Americans have come to expect the schools to deal with problems that have baffled other institutions in the larger society.

The Biggest Problem with Which the Schools In Canada Must Deal

	National Totals %		National Totals %
Drugs, smoking, alcohol	17.2	Problems with school boards/organization of schools	2.6
Lack of discipline	16.5	There are no problems	2.6
Pupils' lack of interest/ truancy/attitudes	13.4	Declining enrollment	2.1
Curriculum problems	10.6	Distance to school/ busing	2.0
Teachers' lack of interest/quality of performance	8.0	Vandalism	2.0
Inadequate financial support	7.0	Too much free time/ distractions	1.5
Pupil/teacher ratio	6.3	Communication between teacher and pupil	1.2
Miscellaneous	6.1	Don't know/ no answer	19.1
Domestic problems	5.8		
Aspects of multiculturalism	2.8		

*Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.

"Forty-three percent of those questioned didn't know the answers."

Amount of Effort Demanded of Students

Asked to grade their local schools for the amount of effort that these schools demand of students, 9% of Canadians gave the schools a grade of A, 26% gave them a B, 26% gave them a C, 11% gave them a D, 5% gave them a FAIL, and 23% said that they did not know. Two somewhat comparable questions in the 1984 Gallup survey of U.S. attitudes — asking whether elementary students and high school students in the U.S. are made to work too hard in school and on homework or not hard enough — yielded the following results:

	Elementary School %	High School %
Too hard	5	4
About right amount	24	18
Not hard enough	59	67
Don't know	12	11

It seems fair to conclude that Canadians are relatively satisfied with the amount of effort that their schools demand of students. In the U.S., however, a large segment of the population believes that students are not made to work hard enough, either in elementary school or in high school.

Relationship of Attitudes to Knowledge About the Schools

Respondents who had one or more children in school at some point during the previous three years tended to express more positive opinions about the schools than did respondents without children in school, according to the 1984 CEA poll. For example, 61% of those with children in school gave the schools a grade of A or B, whereas only 42% of those without children in school rated the schools this highly. The U.S. Gallup survey turned up similar findings. Perhaps when people know more about the schools, they are more favorably disposed toward them.

Areas in Which Canadian Schools Excel

The CEA poll asked respondents, "In your opinion, in what areas are the schools in this community doing a particularly good job?" A large number of respondents did not answer this question, but twice the proportion of respondents with children in school than of those without children in school ventured an opinion. Even for respondents with children in school, however, the percentage of "don't know/not stated" responses was one of the highest for any question in the survey.

	National Total %	With Children In School %	No Children In School %
Don't know	39.6	24.1	47.9
Not stated	2.7	1.9	3.1
Total	42.3	26.0	51.0

This finding is surely one of the most startling produced by the 1984 CEA poll. A staggering 42% of the respondents could not offer a single example of an area in which the schools are doing a particularly good job. Among respondents who did answer this question, 9% mentioned sports and athletics, 6% mentioned enrichment activities, and 4% mentioned the provision of high-quality education. But problem areas drew more frequent responses than did these three areas in which — at least according to a small number of respondents — the schools are excelling. Clearly, the schools need to communicate more effectively with the publics they serve.

Areas in Which Canadian Schools Are Excelling

	National Totals %*		National Totals %*
Sports/athletics	9.4	Teaching basics/ fundamentals	2.4
Enrichment activities, such as musical events, tours, library services	6.3	Pupil/teacher relations	2.2
Providing high-quality education	4.8	Arousing and maintaining pupil interest	2.0
Social activities/ clubs	4.6	Availability of computers	1.9
Teachers doing excellent work	4.2	Discipline	1.8
Good teaching methods/ standards	3.6	Developing values/ self-confidence	1.7
Range of programs/ sound curriculum	3.4	Teaching a second language	1.7
Involving parents/ community	3.1	Business/vocational programs	1.6
Preparing students for future occupations	2.7	Programs for the learning disabled/handicapped	1.1
Sound management overall, including managing budget compression	2.7	Miscellaneous	4.7
		None	5.8
		Don't know/ not stated	42.3

*Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.

Conclusion

The 1984 Gallup survey of U.S. attitudes toward the public schools contained many items that were not included in the 1984 CEA poll, and vice versa. Obviously, an opinion poll must seek views on the issues that are of particular concern to its sponsors.

Where it has been possible to directly compare the findings of the most recent U.S. and Canadian polls, however, we have found that public opinion in the two nations tends to be similar on many points. Of course, there is always need for caution in attempts to apply the findings from a survey conducted in one country to an institution in a second country.

Perhaps the most important finding of the 1984 CEA poll is that schools must begin to communicate more effectively with their communities. Canadian educators should be heartened to know that the public believes education to be vital to national strength and individual success. As we continue to improve education in Canada, we must also strive to keep the public continually informed. Only through such openness will we be able to maintain and strengthen public confidence in and support for the schools.

1. George Flower, dean of education at McGill University until his retirement and a former president of the CEA, served as project director. The Canadian Gallup Poll Limited conducted the interviews. To determine the questions to be asked, the CEA sought the advice of a steering committee, which included among its members several representatives of the CEA Advisory Committee on Educational Research.

2. The English version is titled *Speaking Out: The 1984 CEA Poll of Canadian Opinion on Education*. Single copies are available, at $8 each, from the CEA, 252 Bloor St. W., Toronto, Ont. M5S 1V5. □